
Ending the Tragedy of Landmines Through Innovation and Cooperation

By

**Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State**

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The Rotary International is doing tremendous, life-saving work with its worldwide campaign against polio. Polio is often called the "hidden killer." Landmines, too, are hidden killers that lie in wait to strike innocent people. This Seattle meeting can help to forge powerful public-private partnerships that save lives and bring new hope to men, women and children who live in mine-affected countries all across the globe.

Some of you are already involved in mine action. A number of you come from countries where the dangers from landmines are ever present. Many more of you have come to raise your awareness about the global problem of landmines. By the end of the conference, I hope that all of you will have learned more about the components of mine action, mine clearance, and mine risk education for threatened communities and assistance to survivors of mine accidents.

In over sixty countries across the globe, from Afghanistan to Angola, from Bosnia to Cambodia, the United States and many other governments, private organizations and the United Nations are working in partnership to provide humanitarian demining assistance.

Such concerted international action over the past decade has reduced landmine casualties worldwide from 26,000 per year to approximately 10,000 annually. Thousands of square kilometers have been cleared one square meter at a time, and hundreds of thousands of mine survivors have been fitted with prosthetic devices.

Yet, the fact remains that millions of deadly landmines still remain buried, waiting to kill. Men and women and children in many countries still cannot go about their daily lives without risk to life and limb. Casualties still occur at a terrible rate and hundreds of thousands of landmine accident survivors still need help.

By creating and supporting mine action partnerships, you can make a big difference in the lives of people all over the world. You can help parents send their children out to play, free from the fear that they won't come home. You can help villagers put food on their tables by reclaiming their fields for agriculture. You can help the survivors of landmine accidents become fully engaged in their communities. You can help develop new technologies to make demining more effective and less dangerous. You can teach people at risk how to protect themselves and how to protect their families. You can help heal shattered lives. You can help heal torn societies. In short, you can help create a secure and stable environment where freedom and opportunity thrives.

I hope that this conference will heighten public understanding of the landmine danger and will give you an opportunity to exchange ideas and insights. Most importantly, I hope that you will return to your communities with the determination to build strong public-private partnerships that can help make the world mine safe.